



**Project
Space**



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Allana Cooper,
Preserving the Past
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You wake up in a white room without windows. It is bright though, fluorescent almost – what are the first two things you feel? Blink and years go by from then – it's now, now. Did you get to bring the feelings with you? By some stroke of fate or luck or maybe misfortune, you haven't changed at all. Still, you've stayed. But do you remember the feelings – vulnerable? bleak? – or do those get left behind?

I read that last year some scientists found a wasp, a type now extinct. They think that it's around one hundred million years old, but still, to us, now, it was new: the *archaeoteleia astropulvis*. The name *astropulvis* supposedly came from the Latin for stardust. Stardust, both like the cosmic, ancient source of the atoms that shaped us and the earth, and like Ziggy, David Bowie's alien alter-ego.¹ At once, earthly and alien. Neatly encased in some Burmese amber this little wasp didn't move; *still*, it made its way through the years – in a blink – then to now. Travelling from somewhere to elsewhere with something to say, a messenger just like Ziggy.

So I feel myself bidding, “Little wasp, you brought nothing! Just yourself! No songs or poems, no feelings? Prophecies or answers?” I know that forever I'll crave more from you

¹ Elijah J. Talamas, Norman F. Johnson, Matthew L. Buffington, Dong Ren. *Archaeoteleia Masner* in the

and your guileless quietude, but I also know that I know just the fact of you speaks: “don’t rely on consistency, don’t depend on ends.” A terse memorandum from Fortuna concerning her capricious nature.²

Most of us have seen how time flies! It decays, lingers, rots and ripens, heals, hurts, hardens and weakens; it measures, it mystifies, agitates, and aggregates. Time, changes: skin turns to cut turns to scab turns to scar turns to skin. So it’s comforting to know you can pervert what’s unavoidable; that sometimes you can side-step fate, or bad luck. That, like the wasp, you can encase the absurdity of endings in Burmese amber, or maybe a primary coloured wax.

Over time, time has made itself familiar; boastful by nature it can’t help but show us its tricks. And so we can pervert and prevent and preserve it, all in ways that trick time right back. We can build archives, and rooms, capture images and objects, that hold messages to the future. We can decide for ourselves what’s worth keeping – yet, sometimes, *what is* won’t do. We may pick and choose our own poetry of things, since to preserve, wittingly, is to first decide our current parameters on living.³ If you are like the surrealist avant garde, you might make objects out of your dreamworks; an action that “thing” theorist Bill Brown says would register your “refusal to occupy the world as it was.”⁴

Or, you might choose to enshrine mundane: the protective mesh sleeve of a pear, chicken wire, or bubble wrap – the world *as is*. To choose, as **Allana Cooper** has, to build the unwonted archive. Choose to make the world *as it is, as it will be*. Collecting found objects in various states of functionality and decay, Allana Cooper’s *Preserving the Past* engages multi-mediated processes of “preservation” including: digital scans of the

² In ancient Roman religion Fortuna was the goddess of fortune, and a personified deity of luck. She has evolved over time to “Lady Justice.”

³ Poetry of things and concept of “parameters on living” made in reference to Ettore Sottsass and the Memphis group, see: www.memphis-milano.com/collections/memphis-milano

⁴ Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry (Things)* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 1-22. Pg. 10 -11.

objects, transferring their image, and coating them in wax before revealing it slightly. At once, she preserves and destroys. In the gesture of encasing the objects in primary coloured wax she both removes their functionality while ensuring their longevity; in scanning and painting she maps and remembers their form while de-contextualizing and adapting their image.

Immersing the viewer within the environment of her installations, *Preserving the Past* is filled with paneled images and an assemblage of objects spread across the walls of the space. Here, Cooper generates a space that directly acknowledges time while sitting slightly outside of it. In here, the objects reign, their decay is both concealed and suspended. Preservation is a dance with *erotos*, that amorphous charm wedged between life and death.⁵ The dance can resemble a wrestle, as we try – over, under, again – to imbue our essence in object. Without Ziggy to sing for us, it considers what to say to those a hundred million years from now – will they even be? To them like they're ourselves – will we even be? I wonder how do we send messages full of dimension, full of feeling, and properly embalm our likely erring, curious nature.

It could be years from now, when material objects of this nature have gone extinct, that they arrive as messengers of some sort. What is the memorandum they issue? Or, what do they reveal about our current parameters for living? Perhaps the materialist nature of the world today is best encapsulated in the once-loved scraps left sitting on the stoop outside our house; placed out in a blind hope that someone will come by, and take them off our hands. We hope for someone to either love these things anew, or otherwise just to shield us from that final act of refusal – the unalloyed disposal. Instead, Cooper dedicates the decaying for those who are to come, who might look with incredulity at how we built and crumbled, preserved and destroyed.

⁵ Japanese photographer Nobuyoshi Araki coined the term '*erotos*,' as a combination of the Greek "eros" (love, desire) and "thantos" (death), as a manner of expressing how the beauty within his photographs were always tinged with their own ephemerality.

-Kate Kolberg

This exhibition is part of Xpace Recent Grad Summer Residency program